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AUTHOR Ford, Rose
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ABSTRACT

A pilot program designed by Drexel University and the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia orientates junior high school students to the intricate problems of world nutrition education. Audiovisual presentations, role playing, and group debate are among the teaching methods employed. (LH)

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NUTRITION AND THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS: A SEVENTH GRADE WORKSHOP

By Mrs. Rose Ford

Graduate Student, Nesbitt College

Drexel University

Philadelphia, Pa.

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"Is there anyone here who didn't eat yesterday? Is anyone worried about not eating today? Are you sure you will eat tomorrow?" Giggles and puzzled expressions were typical responses to the seemingly absurd questions posed to students in the school district of Philadelphia. But in a world where millions of people are suffering from hunger and millions more are crippled with undernourishment, the questions become frighteningly realistic.

In the winter of 1976 undergraduate and graduate students in Drexel University's Nesbitt College cooperated with the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia to offer a pilot program to 700 Philadelphia students to challenge the need for nutritional education and an increased awareness of the world food crisis.

Seventh and eighth grade students participated in a three-hour workshop at Drexel's Department of Human Behavior and Development and a one-hour presentation in the students' junior high school classrooms. The program was designed as a graduate research project and a valuable pre-teaching experience for thirteen home economics education majors by Rose I. Ford, an assistant professor on an academic study leave from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

A warm handshake and a "Bon girorno", "Good morning" or "Chow"

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greeted about 25 students each morning as they arrived at Drexel. Using NASA photos of Earth, the student teachers introduced the topic of the world food crisis. Photographs of children around the world in "have and have not" countries were used to facilitate an exploration of the concept of interdependent nations. Students were also exposed to a series of maps revealing Philadelphia's perspective in a world of rich and poor nations.

After dividing the class into groups, a team of student teachers helped the participants identify factors contributing to the problem by clipping news articles and listing topics on the blackboard. Students began to comprehend the complexities involved as they discussed the issues of population, food production, weather and climate, energy, technology, economics, cultural factors and the role of first, second, and third world nations.

The basic elements of nutrition and the vital role good nutrition plays in health cannot be ignored in a program exploring world hunger. Questions such as "How much food and what kinds of foods are needed by the people of the world?" and "What do other people eat?" need to be dealt with in order to have a sensitive grasp of the issues surrounding the world's inadequate nutrition.

Since audio-visual is one of the best ways to make a point, students were shown the National Dairy Council film, "The Big Dinner Table", which explored how and what people eat around the world, their food patterns and the four food groups.

Using exhibits they had prepared of foods from different lands, another team of student teachers reinforced concepts from the film. The seventh and eighth graders used charts to match nutrient pictures with their corresponding labels and review the Basic Four Food Groups.

The students read the nutrition labels to find out what nutrients were in given foods.

The morning's program was highlighted by a tour of the nutrition laboratory in Drexel's Nutrition and Food Department. Students were given the opportunity to view laboratory animals used in nutritional deficiency studies. They observed what happens when rats receive insufficient protein or lack B vitamins in their diets, absorbing the information in relation to other people around the world.

After their lunch break, the students were divided into groups to create various projects of information. Using the world food crisis as the theme, one group painted a mural to mount in their school; a second group created collages of the Basic Four Food Groups from magazines, scraps of materials and grains; another group studied nutrition labels and drew charts comparing nutrient values found, for example, in soda versus milk, rice versus potatoes, and hamburger versus liver.

Role playing is an excellent learning device for both the role player and the audience. With this in mind, the students were asked to produce an educational and entertaining skit titled "The Case of the Missing Food Group". Students played the parts of Ruthie Ricketts, Polly Poor Sight, Tom Tired Blood, He Man Harry and others. Each one read his or her part explaining what nutritional deficiency had caused their particular ailment.

By the end of the day, students were volunteering solutions to the world food crisis and offering ideas on how they could become involved in the solutions through available resources in Philadelphia.

A complimentary program was designed for a one-hour presentation in the participating junior high schools. Factors contributing to the

world hunger crisis were reviewed and discussed. Students also participated in a simulation game which drew on the concept of "have and have not" nations.

The movie "The Chemical Feast" further explored nutritional labeling information, with sample labels distributed and read to identify the nutritional value of particular foods. The labels were used in a game in which the students competed. The one-hour presentation emphasized the urgency of the world hunger crisis and the interdependence of nations.

The world hunger crisis is a challenge which needs to be faced by leaders of nations as well as educators. The pilot program offered by Drexel's educators and the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia was one positive and successful answer to that challenge.

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